CHOP CHIN

AND THE GOLDEN DRAGON...

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CHOP-CHIN

AND

THE GOLDEN DRAGON

At last the Emperor began to dream. He heard an awful voice, the voice of the Golden Dragon. "Wah-song! Wah-song! Awake!"

CHOP-CHIN

AND

THE GOLDEN DRAGON

BY

LAURA E. RICHARDS

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"THE JOYOUS STORY OF TOTO," ETC.

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CHOP-CHIN

AND

THE GOLDEN DRAGON

ONCE upon a time, long ago and long ago, there lived in Pekin, which, as you all know, is the chief city of the Chinese Empire, a boy whose name was Chop-Chin. He was the son of Ly-Chee, a sweeper of the Imperial court-yard, whose duty it was to keep the pavement of the court-yard always absolutely clean, in case His Celestial Majesty, the Emperor, should feel inclined to put his celestial and majestic nose out-of-doors. Chop-Chin hoped to become a sweeper also, when he was a little older; but at the time when my story begins he was only twelve years old, and the law required that all sweepers should have passed their fourteenth year. So Chop-Chin helped his mother about the house, — for he

was a good boy, — carried his father's dinner to him, and made himself generally useful.

One day Chop-Chin entered the court-yard at the usual time, carrying a jar of rice on his head, and a melon in one hand. These were for his father's dinner, and setting them down in a shaded corner, on the cool white marble pavement, he looked about for his father. But Ly-Chee was nowhere to be seen. A group of sweepers stood at the farther end of the court-yard, talking together in a state of wild excitement, with many gestures. One of them drew his hand across his throat rapidly, and they all shuddered. Some one was to be killed, then? Chop-Chin wondered what it all meant. Suddenly one of the group caught sight of him, and at once they fell silent. Two or three, who were friends of his father, began to wring their hands and tear their clothes, and the oldest sweeper of all advanced solemnly toward the boy, holding out both his hands, with the palms downward, in token of sympathy.

"My son," he said, "what is man's life but

a string of beads, which at one time or another must be broken? Shall the wise man disquiet himself whether more or fewer beads have passed over the hand?"

"What words are these?" cried Chop-Chin, alarmed, though he knew not why. "Why do you look and speak so strangely, Yow-Lay; and where is my father?"

The old sweeper led the boy to a stone bench, and bade him sit down beside him. "Thou knowest," he said, "that the first duty of us sweepers is to keep the court-yard always as clean as the sky after rain, and as white as the breath of the frost."

"I know it well," replied the boy. "Does not my father wear out two pairs of scrubbing-shoes in a month?"

"Alas! my son," said the old man, "your father will wear out no more scrubbing-shoes. Listen! This morning, while we were all busily at work, it chanced through some evil fate that His Celestial Majesty felt a desire to taste the freshness of the morning air. Unannounced he came, with only the Princely

Parasol-Holder, the Unique Umbrella-Opener, and seven boys to hold up his celestial train. You know that your father is slightly deaf? Yes. Well, he stood — my good friend Ly-Chee — he stood with his back to the palace. He heard not the noise of the opening door, and at the very moment when His Celestial Majesty stepped out into the court-yard, Ly-Chee cast a great bucketful of ice-cold water backward, with fatal force and precision."

Chop-Chin shuddered, and hid his face in his hands.

"Picture to yourself the dreadful scene!" continued the ancient sweeper. "The Celestial Petticoat, of yellow satin damask, was drenched. The Celestial Shoes, of chicken-skin embroidered in gold, were reduced to a pulp. A shriek burst from every mouth! Your unhappy father turned, and seeing what he had done, fell on his face, as did all the rest of us. In silence we waited for the awful voice, which presently said: —

"'Princely Parasol-Holder, our feet are wet.'

"The Princely Parasol-Holder groaned, and

chattered his teeth together to express his anguish.

"'Unique Umbrella-Opener,' continued the Emperor, 'our petticoat is completely saturated.'

"The Unique Umbrella-Opener tore his clothes, and shook his hair wildly about his face, with moans of agony.

"'Let this man's head be removed at sunrise to-morrow!' concluded His Celestial Majesty.

"Then we all, lying on our faces, wept and cried aloud, and besought the celestial mercy for our comrade. We told the Emperor of Ly-Chee's long and faithful service; of his upright and devout life; of his wife and children, who looked to him for their daily bread. But all was of no avail. He repeated, in dreadful tones, his former words: —

"'Our feet are wet. Our petticoat is saturated. Let this man's head be removed at sunrise to-morrow.'

"Then the Unique Umbrella-Holder, who is a kindly man, made also intercession for

Ly-Chee. But now the Emperor waxed wroth, and he said: —

"'Are our clothes to be changed, or do we stand here all day in wetness because of this dog? We swear that unless the Golden Dragon himself come down from his altar and beg for this man's life, he shall die! Enough!' And with these words he withdrew into the palace.

"So thou seest, my son," said the old man, sadly, "that all is over with thy poor father. He is now in the prison of the condemned, and to-morrow at sunrise he must die. Go home, boy, and comfort thy poor mother, telling her this sad thing as gently as thou mayest."

Chop-Chin arose, kissed the old man's hand in token of gratitude for his kindness, and left the court-yard without a word. His head was in a whirl, and strange thoughts darted through it. He went home, but did not tell his mother of the fate which awaited her husband on the morrow. He could not feel that it was true. It *could not be* that the

next day, all in a moment, his father would cease to live. There must be some way,—*some* way to save him. And then he seemed to hear the dreadful words, "Unless the Golden Dragon himself come down from his altar and beg for this man's life, he shall die." He told his mother, in answer to her anxious questions, that his father meant to pass the night in the court-yard, as he would be wanted very early in the morning; and as it was a hot day, and promised a warm night, the good woman felt no uneasiness, but turned again to her pots and pans.

But Chop-Chin sat on the bench in front of the house, with his head in his hands, thinking deeply.

That evening, at sunset, a boy was seen walking slowly along the well-paved street which led to the great temple of the Golden Dragon. He was clad in a snow-white tunic falling to his knees; his arms and legs were bare; and his pig-tail, unbraided and hanging in a crinkly mass below his

waist, showed that he was bent on some sacred mission. In his hands, raised high above his head, he carried a bronze bowl of curious workmanship. Many people turned to look at the boy, for his face and figure were of singular beauty.

"He carries the prayers of some great prince," they said, "to offer at the shrine of the Golden Dragon."

And, indeed, it was at the great bronze gate of the Temple that the boy stopped. Poising the bronze bowl gracefully on his head with one hand, with the other he knocked three times on the gate. It opened, and revealed four guards clad in black armor, who stood with glittering pikes crossed, their points towards the boy.

"What seekest thou," asked the leader, "in the court of the Holy Dragon?"

Chop-Chin (for I need not tell you the boy was he) lowered the bowl from his head, and offered it to the soldier with a graceful reverence.

"Tong-Ki-Tcheng," he said, "sends you

greeting, and a draught of cool wine. He begs your prayers to the Holy Dragon that he may recover from his grievous sickness, and prays that I may pass onward to the shrine."

The guards bowed low at the name of Tong-Ki-Tcheng, a powerful Prince of the Empire, who lay sick of a fever in his palace, as all the city knew. Each one in turn took a draught from the deep bowl, and the leader said: —

"Our prayers shall go up without ceasing for Tong-Ki-Tcheng, the noble and great. Pass on, fair youth, and good success go with thee!"

They lowered their pikes, and Chop-Chin passed slowly through the court-yard paved with black marble, and came to the second gate, which was of shining steel. Here he knocked again, and the gate was opened by four guards clad in steel from top to toe, and glittering in the evening light.

"What seekest thou," they asked, "in the court of the Holy Dragon?"

Chop-Chin answered as before: —

"Tong-Ki-Tcheng sends you greeting, and a draught of cool wine. He begs your prayers to the Holy Dragon that he may recover from his grievous sickness, and prays that I may pass onward to the shrine."

The guards drank deeply from the bowl, and their leader replied: "Our prayers shall not cease to go up for Tong-Ki-Tcheng. Pass on, and good success go with thee!"

Onward the boy went, holding the bronze bowl high above his head. He crossed the white marble court-yard, and his heart beat when he came to the third gate, which was of whitest ivory, for he knew that beyond the third court-yard was the Temple itself, — the House of Gold, in which dwelt the mighty Dragon, the most sacred idol in all China. He paused a moment, and then with a steady hand knocked at the gate. It opened without a sound, and there stood four guards in white armor inlaid with gold. The same questions and answers were repeated. They drank from the bowl, promised their

prayers for Tong-Ki-Tcheng, and then bade the boy pass onward to the golden gate, which gleamed at the farther end of the court-yard.

"But see that thou touch not the gate!" said the chief soldier. "It is the gate of the Temple itself, and no profane hand may rest upon it. Speak only, and the priests will hear and open to thee."

Softly Chop-Chin paced across the last court, which was paved with blocks of ivory and silver, laid in cunning patterns. Halting before the gate of gold, he raised the bowl in his hands, and said softly:—

"Ka Ho Yai! Yai Nong Ti!
Tong-Ki-Tcheng Lo Hum Ki Ni!"

The gates opened, and showed four priests in robes of cloth-of-gold, with golden censers in hand.

"Rash youth!" said the chief priest, "by what right or by whose order comest thou here, to the Sacred Shrine of the Holy Dragon?"

Chop-Chin knelt upon the threshold of the golden gate, and, with bowed head and downcast eyes, held out the bronze bowl.

"By the right of mortal sickness, most holy priest, come I hither!" he said, "and by order of the noble Tong-Ki-Tcheng. He prays thee and thy brethren to drink to his recovery from his grievous malady, and that your prayers may go up with mine at the Jewelled Shrine itself."

The priest drank solemnly from the bowl, and handed it to his assistants, the last of whom drained the last drop of wine.

"Our prayers shall truly go up for Tong-Ki-Tcheng," he said. "Give me thy hand, fair youth, and I will lead thee to the Jewelled Shrine. But first I will cover thine eyes, for none save ourselves, priests of the First Order of the Saki-Pan, may look upon the face of the Holy Dragon."

So saying, he bound a silk handkerchief firmly over the boy's eyes, and taking his hand, led him slowly forward.

Chop-Chin's heart was beating so violently

that he was half suffocated. He felt the floor suddenly cold, cold, beneath his feet, and knew that he was walking on the golden floor of the Temple. A few steps farther, the hand of the priest drew him downward, and together with the four priests he lay prostrate on his face before the shrine of the Golden Dragon.

A great silence followed. The warm, incense-laden air was stirred by no sound save the breathing of the five suppliants. No breeze rustled the heavy satin curtains which shrouded the windows; no hum of insect or song of bird came from the outer world, which was fast settling down into night.

Silence!

The boy Chop-Chin lay as still as if he were carved in marble. He held his breath from time to time, and his whole being seemed strained to one effort, — that of listening. Did he hear anything? Was the breathing of the four priests changing a little, — growing deeper, growing louder? There! and there again! was that a whisper

of prayer, or was it — could it be — the faintest suspicion of a snore? He lay still; waited and listened, listened and waited. After a little while there could be no doubt about it, — the four men were breathing heavily, slowly, regularly; and one of them rolled out a sonorous, a majestic snore, which resounded through the heavy perfumed air of the Temple, yet caused no movement among the other three. There could be no doubt about it, — the priests were asleep!

Slowly, softly, the boy lifted his head; then he rose to his knees, and looked fearfully at the sleepers. There they lay, flat on their faces, their hands clasped over their heads. He touched one of them, — there was no answering movement. He shook another by the shoulders; he shook them all. They snored in concert, but gave no other sign of life. The drugged wine had done its work.

Then, and not till then, did Chop-Chin venture to lift his eyes and look upon the awful mystery which was hidden by these golden walls. He trembled, he turned white

as the tunic which covered his dusky limbs; but standing erect, he gazed firmly at the Golden Dragon. From the floor rose a splendid altar of gold, studded thick with precious gems. Rubies, sapphires, and emeralds, set in mystic lines and figures, formed the characters which told the thirty-two names of the world-renowned dragon; and on the top of this glittering pedestal, fifteen feet in the air, stood the idol itself.

It was, indeed, a marvellous thing to look upon. Ten feet long, composed entirely of thin scales of the purest gold, laid over and over each other, and each scale tipped with a diamond. Two magnificent rubies glowed in the eye-sockets, and the head was surmounted by a crown of emeralds worth any ordinary kingdom. But the tail! the tail was the wonder of wonders. Millions of delicate gold wires as fine as silk waved gracefully from the scaly tip a length of three feet, and each one was tipped with a diamond, a ruby, or an emerald of surpassing beauty and lustre. So wonderful was the

shimmering light of the stones that the whole tail seemed to sway and curl to and fro, as if some living creature were moving it, and rays of rainbow-colored light darted from it on every side, dazzling the eyes of the beholder.

Chop-Chin gazed and gazed, and hid his eyes and trembled, and gazed again. At last he shook himself together, and whispered, "My father! my father!" Then softly, surely, he began to climb up the golden altar. Stepping carefully from glittering point to point, holding on here by a projecting ornament of carven amethyst, there by a block of jasper or onyx, he reached the top; then steadying himself, he leaned forward and lifted the Holy Dragon from its stand. To his amazement, instead of being barely able to move it, he found he could easily carry it, for the golden plates which formed it were so delicate that the weight of the whole great creature was incredibly small. Lightly the boy lifted it in his arms, and slowly, surely, noiselessly bore

it to the ground. Here he paused, and looked keenly at the sleeping priests. Did that one's eyelids quiver? did his mouth twitch, as if he were waking from his sleep? Was that a movement of yon other man's arm, as if he were stealthily preparing to rise, to spring upon the sacrilegious robber? No! it was but the play of the colored light on the faces and raiment of the sleepers. The voice of their snoring still went up, calmly, evenly, regularly. The wine had done its work well.

Then Chop-Chin took off the sash which bound his tunic at the waist, and shook out its folds. It was a web of crimson silk, so fine and soft that it could be drawn through a finger-ring, and yet, when spread out, so ample that the boy found no difficulty in completely covering with it his formidable prize. Thus enwrapped, he bore the Golden Dragon swiftly from the Temple, closing the doors of gold softly behind him. He crossed the ivory and silver pavement of the inner court, and came to the ivory gate. It was

closed, and beside it lay the four white-clad warriors, sunk in profound slumber. Stepping lightly over their prostrate forms, Chop-Chin opened the gate softly, and found himself in the second court. This, also, he traversed safely, finding the armed guardians of the steel gate also sleeping soundly, with their mouths wide open, and their shining spears pointing valiantly at nothing. A touch upon the glittering gate, — it opened, and Chop-Chin began to breathe more freely when he saw the bronze gates of the outer court-yard, and knew that in another minute, if all went well, he would be in the open street. But, alas! the four guards clad in black armor, who kept watch by the outer gate, had been the first to drink the drugged wine, and already the effect of the powerful narcotic which it contained had begun to wear off. As Chop-Chin, bearing in his arms the shrouded figure of the mighty idol, approached the gate, one of the four sleepers stirred, yawned, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him. It was quite dark, but his eye

caught the faint glimmer of the boy's white robe, and seizing his pike, he exclaimed, —

"Who goes there?"

Chop-Chin instantly stepped to his side, and said in a low whisper, —

"It is I, Nai-Ping, second priest of the Saki-Pan, bound on business of the Temple. Let me pass, and quickly, for the chief priest waits my return."

The sentinel bowed low, and undid the fastenings of the huge bronze gates. They swung open silently, and the boy passed through with his awful burden.

"Strange!" soliloquized the guard, as he drew the massive bolts again. "I never knew one of the priests to go out at this time of night. But I dared not say anything, lest he should find out that I was asleep at my post. And now that he is gone," he added, "I may as well just take forty winks, as he may be away some time."

So saying, he curled himself up on the marble pavement, and fell this time into a natural slumber.

Ten o'clock of a dark night. The outer gates of the royal palace were closed, though lights still shone in many of the windows. Outside the gate a sentinel was pacing up and down, armed with pike and broadsword. Every time he turned on his beat, he looked up and down the narrow street to see if anything or anybody were approaching. Suddenly, as he wheeled about, he saw before him a figure which seemed to have sprung all in a moment out of the blackness of the night. It was the figure of a boy, carrying a burden considerably larger than himself, — a dark and shapeless mass, which yet seemed not to be heavy in proportion to its size.

"What is this?" cried the astonished sentinel. "Who art thou, and what monstrous burden is this thou carriest so lightly?"

"Hist!" said the boy, speaking in an awe-struck whisper, "speak not so loud, friend! This is the Celestial Footstool!"

The sentinel recoiled, and stared in dismay at the dark bundle.

"May the Holy Dragon preserve me!" he said. "What has happened?"

"His Celestial Majesty," replied Chop-Chin, "threw it in anger at his Putter-on-of-Slippers yesterday, and broke one of its legs. All day my master, the Chief Cabinet-maker, has been at work on it, and now he has sent me with it by nightfall, that no profane eye may see clearly even the outer covering of the sacred object."

"Pass in," said the sentinel, opening the gate. "But tell me, knowest thou how it will fare with the Putter-on-of-Slippers? He is cousin to my stepfather's aunt by marriage, and I would not that aught of ill should befall so near a relative."

"Alas! I know not," said the boy, hastening forward. "I fear it may go hard with him."

The sentinel shook his head sadly, and resumed his walk; while Chop-Chin crept softly through the court-yard, keeping close to the wall, and feeling as he went along for a certain little door he knew of, which led by a staircase cut in the thickness of the wall to

a certain unused closet, near the Celestial Bed-chamber.

While all this was going on, the Emperor of China, the great and mighty Wah-Song, was going to bed. He had sipped his night-draught of hot wine mingled with honey and spices, sitting on the edge of the Celestial Bed, with the Celestial Nightcap of cloth-of-silver tied comfortably under his chin, and the Celestial Dressing-gown wrapped around him. He had scolded the Chief Pillow-thumper because the pillows were not fat enough, and because there were only ten of them instead of twelve. He had boxed the ears of the Tyer-of-the-Strings-of-the-Nightcap, and had thrown his golden goblet at the Principal Pourer, who brought him the wine. And when all these things were done, his Celestial Majesty Wah-Song got into bed, and was tucked in by the Finishing Toucher, who got his nose well tweaked by way of thanks. Then the taper of perfumed wax was lighted, and the shade of alabaster put over it, and then the other lights were extinguished; and

then the attendants all crawled out backwards on their hands and knees, and shut the door after them; and then His Celestial Majesty went to sleep.

Peacefully the Emperor slept, — one hour, two hours, three hours, — discoursing eloquently the while in the common language of mankind, — the language of the nose. At last he began to dream, — a dreadful dream. He was in the Golden Temple, praying before the Jewelled Shrine. He heard an awful voice, — the voice of the Golden Dragon. It called his name; it glared upon him with its ruby eyes; it lifted its crowned head, and stretched its long talons toward him. Ah! ah! The Emperor tried to scream, but he could make no sound. Once more the dreadful voice was heard: —

"Wah-Song! Wah-Song! Awake!"

The Emperor sprang up in bed, and looked about him with eyes wild with terror. Ah! what was that? — that glittering form standing at the foot of his bed; that crowned head raised high as if in anger; those

glaring red eyes fixed menacingly upon him!

"Ah, horror! ah, destruction! the Golden Dragon is here!"

With one long howl of terror and anguish, His Celestial Majesty Wah-Song rolled off the bed and under it, in one single motion, and lay there flat on his face, with his hands clasped over his head. Quaking in every limb, his teeth chattering, and a cold sweat pouring from him, he listened as the awful voice spoke again.

"Wah-Song!" said the Golden Dragon, "thou hast summoned me, and I am here!"

The wretched Emperor moaned.

"I — I — I sum-summon thee, most Golden and Holy Dragon?" he stammered faintly. "May I be b-b-bastinadoed if I did!"

"Listen!" said the Dragon, sternly, "and venture not to speak save when I ask thee a question. Yesterday morning, in consequence of thine own caprice in going out unannounced, thy silly shoes and thy pusillanimous petticoat became wet. For this

nothing, thou hast condemned to death my faithful servant Ly-Chee, who has brought me fresh melons every Tuesday afternoon for thirty years. When others, less inhuman than thou, interceded for his life, thou madest reply, 'We swear, that unless the Golden Dragon himself come down from his altar and beg for this man's life, he shall die!'"

The Emperor groaned, and clawed the carpet in his anguish.

"Therefore, Wah-Song," continued the Dragon, "I AM HERE! I come not to beg, but to command. Dost thou hear me?"

"Ye-ye-yes!" murmured the wretched monarch. "I hear thee, Most Mighty. I—I—did n't know he brought thee melons. I brought thee two dozen pineapples myself, the other day," he added piteously.

"Thou didst!" exclaimed the Golden Dragon, fiercely. "Thou didst, *slave!* and they were half-rotten. HA!" and he gave a little jump on the floor, making his glittering tail wave, and his flaming eyes glared yet more fiercely at the unfortunate Wah-

Song, who clung yet more closely to the carpet, and drummed on it with his heels in an extremity of fear.

"Listen, now," said the Fiery Idol, "to my commands. Before day-break thou wilt send a free pardon to Ly-Chee, who now lies in the prison of the condemned, expecting to die at sunrise."

"I will! I will!" cried the Emperor.

"Moreover," continued the Dragon, "thou wilt send him, by a trusty messenger, twenty bags of goodly ducats, one for every hour that he has spent in prison."

The Emperor moaned feebly, for he loved his goodly ducats.

"Furthermore, thou wilt make Ly-Chee thy Chief Sweeper for life, with six brooms of gilded straw, with ivory handles, as his yearly perquisite, besides three dozen pairs of scrubbing-shoes; and his son, Chop-Chin, shalt thou appoint as Second Sweeper, to help his father."

The Emperor moaned again, but very faintly, for he dared not make any objection.

"These are my orders!" continued the Dragon. "Obey them strictly and speedily, and thine offence may be pardoned. Neglect them, even in the smallest particular, and — Ha! Hum! Wurra-*wurra*-G-R-R-R-R-R-R-R!" and here the Dragon opened his great red mouth, and uttered so fearful a growl that the miserable Emperor lost hold of such little wits as had remained to him, and fainted dead away.

Ten minutes later, the sentinel at the gate was amazed at the sight of the Chief Cabinet-maker's apprentice, reappearing suddenly before him, with his monstrous burden still in his arms. The boy's hair was dishevelled, and his face was very pale. In truth, it had been very hard work to get in and out of the hollow golden monster, and Chop-Chin was well-nigh exhausted by his efforts, and the great excitement which had nerved him to carry out his bold venture.

"How now!" cried the sentinel. "What means this, boy?"

"Alas!" said Chop-Chin, "alas! unhappy that I am! Was it my fault that the mended leg was a hair-breadth shorter than the others? Good soldier, I have been most grievously belabored, even with the Sacred Footstool itself, which, although it be a great honor, is nevertheless a painful one. And now must I take it back to my master, for it broke again the last time His Celestial Majesty brought it down on my head. Wherefore let me pass, good sentinel, for I can hardly stand for weariness."

"Pass on, poor lad!" said the good-natured soldier. "And yet — stay a moment! thinkest thou that aught would be amiss if I were to take just one peep at the Celestial Footstool? Often have I heard of its marvellous workmanship, and its tracery of pearl and ebony. Do but lift one corner of the mantle, good youth, and let me see at least a leg of the wonder."

"At thy peril, touch it not!" cried the boy, in great alarm. "Knowest thou not that the penalty is four hundred lashes?

Not a single glance have I ventured to cast at it, for they say its color changes if any profane eye rest upon its polished surface."

"Pass on, then, in the name of the Dragon!" said the sentinel, opening the gate; and bidding him a hasty good-night, Chop-Chin hurried away into the darkness.

Now, while all this was going on, it chanced that the four priests of the First Order of the Saki-Pan awoke from their slumber. What their feelings were when they lifted their eyes and saw that the Golden Dragon was gone, is beyond my power to tell. Their terror was so extreme that they did not dare to move, but after the first horrified glance at the bare altar flung themselves flat on their faces again, and howled and moaned in their anguish.

"We slept!" they cried, in a doleful chant of misery. "Yea, verily slept we.

"Ai! ai! we know not why;
Wow! wow! we know not how.

"Thou removedst thyself. Thou raisedst the paw of strength and the hind-feet of swiftness. Because we slept, thou art gone away, and we are desolate, awaiting the speedily-advancing death.

"Hong! Kong! Punka-wunka-woggle!
Hong! Kong! Punka-wunka-wogg!"

While thus the wretched priests lay on the golden floor, bewailing their sin and its dreadful consequences, there fell suddenly on their ears a loud and heavy sound. It was at some distance, — a heavy clang, as of some one striking on metal. "Pong! pong!" what could it be? And now came other sounds, — the opening and shutting of gates, the tread of hasty feet, the sound of hurried voices, and finally a loud knocking at the door of the Temple itself.

"Open, most holy Priests of the Saki-Pan!" cried a voice. "We have strange and fearful news! Open without delay!"

The unhappy priests hurried to the door, and flung it open with trembling hands.

Without stood all the guards of all the gates, the white and the steel-clad soldiers clustering about the four black-clad guardians of the outer gate.

"Speak!" said the chief priest in great agitation, "what is your errand?"

"O Priest!" said the black guards, trembling with excitement, "we heard a great knocking at the gate."

"Yes, yes!" cried the priest, "I know it. What more?"

"O Priest!" said the guards, "we were affrighted, so great was the noise; so we opened the gate but a little way, and peeped through; and we saw — we saw —" They paused, and gasped for breath.

"Speak, sons of pigs!" shrieked the priest, "*what* did you see?"

"We saw the Golden Dragon!" said the soldiers, in a fearful whisper. "He is sitting up — on his hind-legs — with his mouth open! and he knocked — he knocked —"

But the priests of the Saki-Pan waited to hear no more. Rushing through the court-

yards, they flung wide open the great bronze gates. They caught up the Golden Dragon, they raised it high on their shoulders, and with shouts of rejoicing they bore it back to the Temple, while the guards prostrated themselves before it.

"He went out!" sang the priests. "He walked abroad, for the glory and welfare of his subjects. He cast upon the city the eye of beneficence; he waved over it the plenipotentiary tail!

"Ai! ai! we know not why!
Wow! wow! we know not how!

Glory to the Holy Dragon, and happiness and peace to the city and the people!"

But in the house of Ly-Chee all was sunshine and rejoicing. At daybreak, a procession had come down the little street, — a troop of soldiers in the imperial uniform, with music sounding before them, and gay banners flaunting in the morning air. In the midst of the troop rode Ly-Chee, on a splendid black horse. He was dressed in

a robe of crimson satin embroidered with gold, and round his neck hung strings of jewels most glorious to see. Behind him walked twenty slaves, each carrying a fat bag of golden ducats; and after the troop came more slaves, bearing gilded brooms with ivory handles and scrubbing-shoes of the finest quality. And all the soldiers and all the slaves cried aloud, continually: —

"Honor to Ly-Chee, the Chief-Sweeper of the court-yard! Honor and peace to him and all his house!"

The procession stopped before the little house, and the good sweeper, stupefied still with astonishment at his wonderful good fortune, dismounted and clasped his wife and children in his arms. And they wept together for joy, and the soldiers and the slaves and all the people wept with them.

But the Celestial Emperor, Wah-Song, lay in bed for two weeks, speaking to no man, and eating nothing but water-gruel. And when he arose, at the end of that time, behold! he was as meek as a six-year-old child.

THE THREE REMARKS.

THERE was once a princess, the most beautiful princess that ever was seen. Her hair was black and soft as the raven's wing; her eyes were like stars dropped in a pool of clear water, and her speech like the first tinkling cascade of the baby Nile. She was also wise, graceful, and gentle, so that one would have thought she must be the happiest princess in the world.

But, alas! there was one terrible drawback to her happiness. She could make only three remarks. No one knew whether it was the fault of her nurse, or a peculiarity born with her; but the sad fact remained, that no matter what was said to her, she could only reply in one of three phrases. The first was, —

"What is the price of butter?"

The second, "Has your grandmother sold her mangle yet?"

And the third, "With all my heart!"

You may well imagine what a great misfortune this was to a young and lively princess. How could she join in the sports and dances of the noble youths and maidens of the court? She could not always be silent, neither could she always say, "With all my heart!" though this was her favorite phrase, and she used it whenever she possibly could; and it was not at all pleasant, when some gallant knight asked her whether she would rather play croquet or Aunt Sally, to be obliged to reply, "What is the price of butter?"

On certain occasions, however, the princess actually found her infirmity of service to her. She could always put an end suddenly to any conversation that did not please her, by interposing with her first or second remark; and they were also a very great assistance to her when, as happened nearly every day, she received an offer of marriage. Emperors, kings, princes, dukes, earls, marquises, viscounts, baronets, and many other lofty personages

knelt at her feet, and offered her their hands, hearts, and other possessions of greater or less value. But for all her suitors the princess had but one answer. Fixing her deep radiant eyes on them, she would reply with thrilling earnestness, "*Has* your grandmother sold her mangle yet?" and this always impressed the suitors so deeply that they retired, weeping, to a neighboring monastery, where they hung up their armor in the chapel, and taking the vows, passed the remainder of their lives mostly in flogging themselves, wearing hair shirts, and putting dry toast-crumbs in their beds.

Now, when the king found that all his best nobles were turning into monks, he was greatly displeased, and said to the princess: —

"My daughter, it is high time that all this nonsense came to an end. The next time a respectable person asks you to marry him, you will say, 'With all my heart!' or I will know the reason why."

But this the princess could not endure, for she had never yet seen a man whom she was

willing to marry. Nevertheless, she feared her father's anger, for she knew that he always kept his word; so that very night she slipped down the back stairs of the palace, opened the back door, and ran away out into the wide world.

She wandered for many days, over mountain and moor, through fen and through forest, until she came to a fair city. Here all the bells were ringing, and the people shouting and flinging caps into the air; for their old king was dead, and they were just about to crown a new one. The new king was a stranger, who had come to the town only the day before; but as soon as he heard of the old monarch's death, he told the people that he was a king himself, and as he happened to be without a kingdom at that moment, he would be quite willing to rule over them. The people joyfully assented, for the late king had left no heir; and now all the preparations had been completed. The crown had been polished up, and a new tip put on the sceptre, as the old king had

quite spoiled it by poking the fire with it for upwards of forty years.

When the people saw the beautiful princess, they welcomed her with many bows, and insisted on leading her before the new king.

"Who knows but that they may be related?" said everybody. "They both came from the same direction, and both are strangers."

Accordingly the princess was led to the market-place, where the king was sitting in royal state. He had a fat, red, shining face, and did not look like the kings whom she had been in the habit of seeing; but nevertheless the princess made a graceful courtesy, and then waited to hear what he would say.

The new king seemed rather embarrassed when he saw that it was a princess who appeared before him; but he smiled graciously, and said, in a smooth oily voice, —

"I trust your 'Ighness is quite well. And 'ow did yer 'Ighness leave yer pa and ma?"

At these words the princess raised her head and looked fixedly at the red-faced king; then she replied, with scornful distinctness, —

"What is the price of butter?"

At these words an alarming change came over the king's face. The red faded from it, and left it a livid green; his teeth chattered; his eyes stared, and rolled in their sockets; while the sceptre dropped from his trembling hand and fell at the princess's feet. For the truth was, this was no king at all, but a retired butterman, who had laid by a little money at his trade, and had thought of setting up a public house; but chancing to pass through this city at the very time when they were looking for a king, it struck him that he might just as well fill the vacant place as any one else. No one had thought of his being an impostor; but when the princess fixed her clear eyes on him and asked him that familiar question, which he had been in the habit of hearing many times a day for a great part of his life, the guilty butterman thought himself detected, and shook in his guilty shoes.

Hastily descending from his throne, he beckoned the princess into a side-chamber, and closing the door, besought her in moving terms not to betray him.

"Here," he said, "is a bag of rubies as big as pigeon's eggs. There are six thousand of them, and I 'umbly beg your 'Ighness to haccept them as a slight token hof my hesteem, if your 'Ighness will kindly consent to spare a respeckable tradesman the disgrace of being hexposed."

The princess reflected, and came to the conclusion that, after all, a butterman might make as good a king as any one else; so she took the rubies with a gracious little nod, and departed, while all the people shouted, "Hooray!" and followed her, waving their hats and kerchiefs, to the gates of the city.

With her bag of rubies over her shoulder, the fair princess now pursued her journey, and fared forward over heath and hill, through brake and through brier. After several days she came to a deep forest, which she entered without hesitation, for she knew no fear. She

had not gone a hundred paces under the arching limes, when she was met by a band of robbers, who stopped her and asked what she did in their forest, and what she carried in her bag. They were fierce, black-bearded men, armed to the teeth with daggers, cutlasses, pistols, dirks, hangers, blunderbusses, and other defensive weapons; but the princess gazed calmly on them, and said haughtily, —

"Has your grandmother sold her mangle yet?"

The effect was magical. The robbers started back in dismay, crying, "The countersign!" Then they hastily lowered their weapons, and assuming attitudes of abject humility, besought the princess graciously to accompany them to their master's presence. With a lofty gesture she signified assent, and the cringing, trembling bandits led her on through the forest till they reached an open glade, into which the sunbeams glanced right merrily. Here, under a broad oak-tree which stood in the centre of the glade, reclined a man of gigantic stature and

commanding mien, with a whole armory of weapons displayed upon his person. Hastening to their chief, the robbers conveyed to him, in agitated whispers, the circumstance of their meeting the princess, and of her unexpected reply to their questions. Hardly seeming to credit their statement, the gigantic chieftain sprang to his feet, and advancing toward the princess with a respectful reverence, begged her to repeat the remark which had so disturbed his men. With a royal air, and in clear and ringing tones, the princess repeated, —

"*Has* your grandmother sold her mangle yet?" and gazed steadfastly at the robber chief.

He turned deadly pale, and staggered against a tree, which alone prevented him from falling.

"It is true!" he gasped. "We are undone! The enemy is without doubt close at hand, and all is over. Yet," he added with more firmness, and with an appealing glance at the princess, "yet there may be one chance

"It is true!" he gasped. "We are undone! Noble princess!" and here he and the whole band assumed attitudes of supplication.

left for us. If this gracious lady will consent to go forward, instead of returning through the wood, we may yet escape with our lives. Noble princess!" and here he and the whole band assumed attitudes of supplication, "consider, I pray you, whether it would really add to your happiness to betray to the advancing army a few poor foresters, who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. Here," he continued, hastily drawing something from a hole in the oak-tree, "is a bag containing ten thousand sapphires, each as large as a pullet's egg. If you will graciously deign to accept them, and to pursue your journey in the direction I shall indicate, the Red Chief of the Rustywhanger will be your slave forever."

The princess, who of course knew that there was no army in the neighborhood, and who moreover did not in the least care which way she went, assented to the Red Chief's proposition, and taking the bag of sapphires, bowed her farewell to the grateful robbers, and followed their leader down a ferny path which led to the farther end of the

forest. When they came to the open country, the robber chieftain took his leave of the princess, with profound bows and many protestations of devotion, and returned to his band, who were already preparing to plunge into the impenetrable thickets of the midforest.

The princess, meantime, with her two bags of gems on her shoulders, fared forward with a light heart, by dale and by down, through moss and through meadow. By-and-by she came to a fair high palace, built all of marble and shining jasper, with smooth lawns about it, and sunny gardens of roses and gilly-flowers, from which the air blew so sweet that it was a pleasure to breathe it. The princess stood still for a moment, to taste the sweetness of this air, and to look her fill at so fair a spot; and as she stood there, it chanced that the palace-gates opened, and the young king rode out with his court, to go a-catching of nighthawks.

Now when the king saw a right fair princess standing alone at his palace-gate, her rich garments dusty and travel-stained, and

two heavy sacks hung upon her shoulders, he was filled with amazement; and leaping from his steed, like the gallant knight that he was, he besought her to tell him whence she came and whither she was going, and in what way he might be of service to her.

But the princess looked down at her little dusty shoes, and answered never a word; for she had seen at the first glance how fair and goodly a king this was, and she would not ask him the price of butter, nor whether his grandmother had sold her mangle yet. But she thought in her heart, "Now, I have never, in all my life, seen a man to whom I would so willingly say, 'With all my heart!' if he should ask me to marry him."

The king marvelled much at her silence, and presently repeated his questions, adding, "And what do you carry so carefully in those two sacks, which seem over-heavy for your delicate shoulders?"

Still holding her eyes downcast, the princess took a ruby from one bag, and a sapphire from the other, and in silence handed them to

the king, for she willed that he should know she was no beggar, even though her shoes were dusty. Thereat all the nobles were filled with amazement, for no such gems had ever been seen in that country.

But the king looked steadfastly at the princess, and said, "Rubies are fine, and sapphires are fair; but, maiden, if I could but see those eyes of yours, I warrant that the gems would look pale and dull beside them."

At that the princess raised her clear dark eyes, and looked at the king and smiled; and the glance of her eyes pierced straight to his heart, so that he fell on his knees and cried:

"Ah! sweet princess, now do I know that thou art the love for whom I have waited so long, and whom I have sought through so many lands. Give me thy white hand, and tell me, either by word or by sign, that thou wilt be my queen and my bride!"

And the princess, like a right royal maiden as she was, looked him straight in the eyes, and giving him her little white hand, answered bravely, "*With all my heart!*"

THE USEFUL COAL.

THERE was once a king whose name was Sligo. He was noted both for his riches and his kind heart. One evening, as he sat by his fireside, a coal fell out on the hearth. The king took up the tongs, intending to put it back on the fire, but the coal said: —

"If you will spare my life, and do as I tell you, I will save your treasure three times, and tell you the name of the thief who steals it."

These words gave the king great joy, for much treasure had been stolen from him of late, and none of his officers could discover the culprit. So he set the coal on the table, and said: —

"Pretty little black and red bird, tell me, what shall I do?"

"Put me in your waistcoat pocket," said the coal, "and take no more thought for to-night."

Accordingly the king put the coal in his pocket, and then, as he sat before the warm fire, he grew drowsy, and presently fell fast asleep.

When he had been asleep some time, the door opened, very softly, and the High Cellarer peeped cautiously in. This was the one of the king's officers who had been most eager in searching for the thief. He now crept softly, softly, toward the king, and seeing that he was fast asleep, put his hand into his waistcoat-pocket; for in that waistcoat-pocket King Sligo kept the key of his treasure-chamber, and the High Cellarer was the thief. He put his hand into the waistcoat-pocket. S-s-s-s-s! the coal burned it so frightfully that he gave a loud shriek, and fell on his knees on the hearth.

"What is the matter?" cried the king, waking with a start.

"Alas! your Majesty," said the High Cellarer, thrusting his burnt fingers into his bosom, that the king might not see them. "You were just on the point of falling for-

ward into the fire, and I cried out, partly from fright and partly to waken you."

The king thanked the High Cellarer, and gave him a ruby ring as a reward. But when he was in his chamber, and making ready for bed, the coal said to him: —

"Once already have I saved your treasure, and to-night I shall save it again. Only put me on the table beside your bed, and you may sleep with a quiet heart."

So the king put the coal on the table, and himself into the bed, and was soon sound asleep. At midnight the door of the chamber opened very softly, and the High Cellarer peeped in again. He knew that at night King Sligo kept the key under his pillow, and he was coming to get it. He crept softly, softly, toward the bed, but as he drew near it, the coal cried out: —

"One eye sleeps, but the other eye wakes! one eye sleeps, but the other eye wakes! Who is this comes creeping, while honest men are sleeping?"

The High Cellarer looked about him in

affright, and saw the coal burning fiery red in the darkness, and looking for all the world like a great flaming eye. In an agony of fear he fled from the chamber, crying, —

"Black and red! black and red!
The king has a devil to guard his bed."

And he spent the rest of the night shivering in the farthest garret he could find.

The next morning the coal said to the king: —

"Again this night have I saved your treasure, and mayhap your life as well. Yet a third time I shall do it, and this time you shall learn the name of the thief. But if I do this, you must promise me one thing, and that is that you will place me in your royal crown and wear me as a jewel. Will you do this?"

"That will I, right gladly!" replied King Sligo, "for a jewel indeed you are."

"That is well!" said the coal. "It is true that I am dying; but no matter. It is a fine thing to be a jewel in a king's crown, even if one is dead. Now listen, and follow my directions closely. As soon as I am quite black

and dead, — which will be in about ten minutes from now, — you must take me in your hand and rub me all over and around the handle of the door of the treasure-chamber. A good part of me will be rubbed off, but there will be enough left to put in your crown. When you have thoroughly rubbed the door, lay the key of the treasure-chamber on your table, as if you had left it there by mistake. You may then go hunting or riding, but not for more than an hour; and when you return, you must instantly call all your court together, as if on business of the greatest importance. Invent some excuse for asking them to raise their hands, and then arrest the man whose hands are black. Do you understand?"

"I do!" replied King Sligo, fervently, "I do, and my warmest thanks, good Coal, are due to you for this —"

But here he stopped, for already the coal was quite black, and in less than ten minutes it was dead and cold. Then the king took it and rubbed it carefully over the door of the

treasure-chamber, and laying the key of the door in plain sight on his dressing-table, he called his huntsmen together, and mounting his horse, rode away to the forest. As soon as he was gone, the High Cellarer, who had pleaded a headache when asked to join the hunt, crept softly to the king's room, and to his surprise found the key on the table. Full of joy, he sought the treasure-chamber at once, and began filling his pockets with gold and jewels, which he carried to his own apartment, returning greedily for more. In this way he opened and closed the door many times. Suddenly, as he was stooping over a silver barrel containing sapphires, he heard the sound of a trumpet, blown once, twice, thrice. The wicked thief started, for it was the signal for the entire court to appear instantly before the king, and the penalty of disobedience was death. Hastily cramming a handful of sapphires into his pocket, he stumbled to the door, which he closed and locked, putting the key also in his pocket, as there was no time to return it. He flew

to the presence-chamber, where the lords of the kingdom were hastily assembling.

The king was seated on his throne, still in his hunting-dress, though he had put on his crown over his hat, which presented a peculiar appearance. It was with a majestic air, however, that he rose and said: —

"Nobles, and gentlemen of my court! I have called you together to pray for the soul of my lamented grandmother, who died, as you may remember, several years ago. In token of respect, I desire you all to raise your hands to Heaven."

The astonished courtiers, one and all, lifted their hands high in air. The king looked, and, behold! the hands of the High Cellarer were as black as soot! The king caused him to be arrested and searched, and the sapphires in his pocket, besides the key of the treasure-chamber, gave ample proof of his guilt. His head was removed at once, and the king had the useful coal, set in sapphires, placed in the very front of his crown, where it was much admired and praised as a Black Diamond.

THE NAUGHTY COMET.

THE door of the Comet House was open. In the great court-yard stood hundreds of comets, of all sizes and shapes. Some were puffing and blowing, and arranging their tails, all ready to start; others had just come in, and looked shabby and forlorn after their long journeyings, their tails drooping disconsolately; while others still were switched off on side-tracks, where the tinker and the tailor were attending to their wants, and setting them to rights. In the midst of all stood the Comet Master, with his hands behind him, holding a very long stick with a very sharp point. The comets knew just how the point of that stick felt, for they were prodded with it whenever they misbehaved themselves; accordingly, they all remained very quiet, while he gave his orders for the day.

In a distant corner of the court-yard lay an old comet, with his tail comfortably curled

up around him. He was too old to go out, so he enjoyed himself at home in a quiet way. Beside him stood a very young comet, with a very short tail. He was quivering with excitement, and occasionally cast sharp impatient glances at the Comet Master.

"Will he *never* call me?" he exclaimed, but in an undertone, so that only his companion could hear. "He knows I am dying to go out, and for that very reason he pays no attention to me. I dare not leave my place, for you know what he is."

"Ah!" said the old comet, slowly, "if you had been out as often as I have, you would not be in such a hurry. Hot, tiresome work, *I* call it. And what does it all amount to?"

"Ay, that's the point!" exclaimed the young comet. "What *does* it all amount to? That is what I am determined to find out. I cannot understand your going on, travelling and travelling, and never finding out why you do it. *I* shall find out, you may be very sure, before I have finished my first journey."

"Better not! better not!" answered the old comet. "You'll only get into trouble. Nobody knows except the Comet Master and the Sun. The Master would cut you up into inch pieces if you asked him, and the Sun —"

"Well, what about the Sun?" asked the young comet, eagerly.

"Short-tailed Comet No. 73!" rang suddenly, clear and sharp, through the court-yard.

The young comet started as if he had been shot, and in three bounds he stood before the Comet Master, who looked fixedly at him.

"You have never been out before," said the Master.

"No, sir!" replied No. 73; and he knew better than to add another word.

"You will go out now," said the Comet Master. "You will travel for thirteen weeks and three days, and will then return. You will avoid the neighborhood of the Sun, the Earth, and the planet Bungo. You will turn to the left on meeting other comets, and you are not allowed to speak to meteors. These are your orders. Go!"

At the word, the comet shot out of the gate and off into space, his short tail bobbing as he went.

Ah ! here was something worth living for. No longer shut up in that tiresome court-yard, waiting for one's tail to grow, but out in the free, open, boundless realm of space, with leave to shoot about here and there and everywhere — well, *nearly* everywhere — for thirteen whole weeks ! Ah, what a glorious prospect ! How swiftly he moved ! How well his tail looked, even though it was still rather short ! What a fine fellow he was, altogether !

For two or three weeks our comet was the happiest creature in all space ; too happy to think of anything except the joy of frisking about. But by-and-by he began to wonder about things, and that is always dangerous for a comet.

"I wonder, now," he said, "why I may not go near the planet Bungo. I have always heard that he was the most interesting of all the planets. And the Sun ! how I *should* like

to know a little more about the Sun! And, by the way, that reminds me that all this time I have never found out *why* I am travelling. It shows how I have been enjoying myself, that I have forgotten it so long; but now I must certainly make a point of finding out. Hello! there comes Long-Tail No. 45. I mean to ask him."

So he turned out to the left, and waited till No. 45 came along. The latter was a middle-aged comet, very large, and with an uncommonly long tail, — quite preposterously long, our little No. 73 thought, as he shook his own tail and tried to make as much of it as possible.

"Good morning, Mr. Long-Tail!" he said as soon as the other was within speaking distance. "Would you be so very good as to tell me what you are travelling for?"

"For six months," answered No. 45 with a puff and a snort. "Started a month ago; five months still to go."

"Oh, I don't mean that!" exclaimed Short-Tail No. 73. "I mean *why* are you travelling at all?"

"Comet Master sent me!" replied No. 45, briefly.

"But what for?" persisted the little comet. "What is it all about? What good does it do? *Why* do we travel for weeks and months and years? That's what I want to find out."

"Don't know, I'm sure!" said the elder, still more shortly. "What's more, don't care!"

The little comet fairly shook with amazement and indignation. "You don't care!" he cried. "Is it possible? And how long, may I ask, have you been travelling hither and thither through space, without knowing or caring why?"

"Long enough to learn not to ask stupid questions!" answered Long-Tail No. 45. "Good morning to you!"

And without another word he was off, with his preposterously long tail spreading itself like a luminous fan behind him. The little comet looked after him for some time in silence. At last he said: —

"Well, *I* call that simply *disgusting!* An ignorant, narrow-minded old — "

"Hello, cousin!" called a clear merry voice just behind him. "How goes it with you? Shall we travel together? Our roads seem to go in the same direction."

The comet turned and saw a bright and sparkling meteor. "I — I — must not speak to you!" said No. 73, confusedly.

"Not speak to me!" exclaimed the meteor, laughing. "Why, what 's the matter? What have I done? I never saw you before in my life."

"N-nothing that I know of," answered No. 73, still more confused.

"Then why must n't you speak to me?" persisted the meteor, giving a little skip and jump. "Eh? tell me that, will you? *Why* must n't you?"

"I — don't — know!" answered the little comet, slowly, for he was ashamed to say boldly, as he ought to have done, that it was against the orders of the Comet Master.

"Oh, gammon!" cried the meteor, with

another skip. "*I* know! Comet Master, eh? But a fine high-spirited young fellow like you isn't going to be afraid of that old tyrant. Come along, I say! If there were any *real reason* why you should not speak to me—"

"That's just what I say," interrupted the comet, eagerly. "What is the reason? Why don't they tell it to me?"

"'Cause there isn't any!" rejoined the meteor. "Come along!"

After a little more hesitation, the comet yielded, and the two frisked merrily along, side by side. As they went, No. 73 confided all his vexations to his new friend, who sympathized warmly with him, and spoke in most disrespectful terms of the Comet Master.

"A pretty sort of person to dictate to you, when he hasn't the smallest sign of a tail himself! I wouldn't submit to it!" cried the meteor. "As to the other orders, some of them are not so bad. Of course, nobody would want to go near that stupid, poky Earth, if he could possibly help it; and the planet Bungo is—ah—is not a very nice

planet, I believe." [The fact is, the planet Bungo contains a large reform-school for unruly meteors, but our friend made no mention of that.] "But as for the Sun, — the bright, jolly, delightful Sun, — why, I am going to take a nearer look at him myself. Come on! We will go together, in spite of the Comet Master."

Again the little comet hesitated and demurred; but after all, he had already broken one rule, and why not another? He would be punished in any case, and he might as well get all the pleasure he could. Reasoning thus, he yielded once more to the persuasions of the meteor, and together they shot through the great space-world, taking their way straight toward the Sun.

When the Sun saw them coming, he smiled and seemed much pleased. He stirred his fire, and shook his shining locks, and blazed brighter and brighter, hotter and hotter. The heat seemed to have a strange effect on the comet, for he began to go faster and faster.

"Hold on!" said the meteor. "Why are you hurrying so? I cannot keep up with you."

"I cannot stop myself!" cried No. 73. "Something is drawing me forward, faster and faster!"

On he went at a terrible rate, the meteor following as best he might. Several planets that he passed shouted to him in warning tones, but he could not hear what they said. The Sun stirred his fire again, and blazed brighter and brighter, hotter and hotter; and onward rushed the wretched little comet, faster and faster, faster and faster!

"Catch hold of my tail and stop me!" he shrieked to the meteor. "I am shrivelling, burning up, in this fearful heat! Stop me, for pity's sake!"

But the meteor was already far behind, and had stopped short to watch his companion's headlong progress. And now, — ah, me! — now the Sun opened his huge fiery mouth. The comet made one desperate effort to stop himself, but it was in vain. An

awful, headlong plunge through the intervening space; a hissing and crackling; a shriek, — and the fiery jaws had closed on Short-Tail No. 73 forever!

"Dear me!" said the meteor. "How very shocking! I quite forgot that the Sun ate comets. I must be off, or I shall get an æon in the Reform School for this. I am really very sorry, for he was a nice little comet!"

And away frisked the meteor, and soon forgot all about it.

But in the great court-yard in front of the Comet House, the Master took a piece of chalk, and crossed out No. 73 from the list of short-tailed comets on the slate that hangs on the door. Then he called out, "No. 1 Express, come forward!" and the swiftest of all the comets stood before him, brilliant and beautiful, with a bewildering magnificence of tail. The Comet Master spoke sharply and decidedly, as usual, but not unkindly.

"No. 73, Short-Tail," he said, "has disobeyed orders, and has in consequence been devoured by the Sun."

Here there was a great sensation among the comets.

"No. 1," continued the Master, "you will start immediately, and travel until you find a runaway meteor, with a red face and blue hair. You are permitted to make inquiries of respectable bodies, such as planets or satellites. When found, you will arrest him and take him to the planet Bungo. My compliments to the Meteor Keeper, and I shall be obliged if he will give this meteor two æons in the Reform School. I trust," he continued, turning to the assembled comets, "that this will be a lesson to all of you!"

And I believe it was.

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